

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 19, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20410

Dear President Trump,

For the past three years, the American people you serve have had to deal with your consistent attacks on the health and safety programs on which they rely. September 26, 2020 marked another attempt you and your Administration have taken to significantly harm at-risk Americans when you released you announced your nominee for the Supreme Court. By nominating Amy Coney Barrett, you have yet again attempted to erode and overturn the Affordable Care Act (ACA), a critical program that has drastically reduced the number of uninsured people across this country. The ACA not only enhanced access to care for physical health, but through Medicaid expansion, it has improved the ability for people to seek care for mental and behavioral health conditions. Your Supreme Court nomination is your most recent attempt to slash funding for health care and safety net programs, continuing your unrelenting war against those who are most vulnerable, those who are most in need, and those who are most sick.

In particular, your Administration has attacked and stigmatized those who are living with mental illness. Amongst other actions, you have strategically and systematically tried to take away the already limited access to health care, caused irrefutable harm by further traumatizing those you swore to protect, and continue to easily dismiss and view these vital health care programs as an “unnecessary burden” on the United States. All of these safety net programs are ones on which those with mental and behavioral health conditions rely.

For someone who claims “they are strongly committed to helping Americans suffering from mental illness,” your words hollow and your actions undermine your speeches.¹ You and your administration continue to fail the American people and continue to roll back any progress we have made in addressing the mental health crisis.

Recently your Administration proposed a funding transfer to respond to the coronavirus which included transferring over \$4.8 million from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration. While there is a clear need to combat the coronavirus, taking money from those suffering from mental and behavioral health conditions is not the appropriate way to address the issue.

A letter clearly detailing and explaining all of the ways in which you and your Administration have hurt and dismissed those with mental and behavioral health conditions would be far too long. Instead, the non-exhaustive list below should indicate how much you have harmed those in need and should act as an impetus to reflect and redirect your energy to protecting those who are struggling.

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-white-house-mental-health-summit/>

Your Administration has:

- Separated children from their parents and put them in detention centers, which often leads to an increased risk of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.²
- Removed children from their parents at the Mexico border, which threatens the mental health of the parents and can traumatize both child and parent.³
- Stigmatized mental illness by associating it with violence and mass shootings, which only continues to add to dangerous rhetoric and misinformation.⁴
- Proposed cutting Medicare spending by \$465 billion, the program which covers services for the disabled and elderly, including substance use disorder and mental health care treatment.⁵
- Attempted to reduce Medicaid, the single largest payer of mental and behavioral health services, spending by \$700 billion in the most recent budget.⁶
- Reduced the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's budget, cutting it by \$62 million in the latest budget proposal.⁷
- Recommended gutting Medicaid in Puerto Rico, after undergoing devastating earthquakes, which includes services for those with mental illness and other conditions.⁸
- Redirected funding meant to rebuild Puerto Rico to a border wall, which only exacerbates the trauma Puerto Ricans had to endure.⁹
- Endorsed the implementation of work requirements for those eligible to receive SNAP benefits, uprooting food security for people with mental illness.¹⁰
- Recommended building more psychiatric hospitals to institutionalize those suffering from mental and behavioral health conditions.¹¹
- Advocated for undoing anti-discrimination rules in education and housing that would place the burden on those suffering from mental health conditions and substance use disorders to prove discrimination occurred.¹²
- Issued illegal block grant guidance, which will cut Medicaid spending by narrowing and removing services, including limiting or eliminating coverage for treatment for substance use and mental health conditions.¹³
- Allowed states to remove and limit enrollees, including those with mental health and substance use disorders.¹⁴

² <https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2018/border-family-separation>

³ Id.

⁴ <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trumps-claims-experts-mental-illness-mass-shootings/story?id=65101823>

⁵ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/trumps-4-8-trillion-budget-proposal-revisits-rejected-cuts>

⁶ Id.

⁷ <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/capitol-connector/2019/03/president-trump-releases-fy-2020-budget-proposal/>

⁸ <https://www.politico.com/news/2019/12/17/trump-puerto-rico-medicare-budget-086674>

⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/at-half-ruined-puerto-rico-base-hurricane-recovery-funds-pulled-for-trumps-wall/2019/09/19/173ad4f4-d63c-11e9-ab26-e6dbec45d3_story.html

¹⁰ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/nearly-700-000-will-lose-food-stamps-usda-work-requirement-n1095726>;

<https://www.harvestpublicmedia.org/post/federal-food-aid-program-difficult-navigate-crucial-service-mentally-ill>

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/11/us/politics/trump-budget.html>

¹² https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/trump-administration-considers-rollback-of-anti-discrimination-rules/2019/01/02/f96347ea-046d-11e9-b5df-5d3874f1ac36_story.html

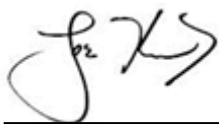
¹³ <https://www.medicare.gov/sites/default/files/Federal-Policy-Guidance/Downloads/smd20001.pdf>

¹⁴ Id.

- Developed a policy changing Medicaid eligibility, which allows states to implement conditional work requirements. Even with exemptions, it would be extremely difficult for those with mental illness to qualify for the program.¹⁵
- Advocated for and supported health insurance plans that are short-term, or limited duration plans, which would not be required to cover mental or behavioral health treatments and services.¹⁶
- In two years, spent close to \$6 million in taxpayer dollars on personal branding for the Administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, money that should have been spent on Medicare and Medicaid services, including mental and behavioral health care.¹⁷
- Headed the effort to repeal the ACA which would remove protections for pre-existing conditions, including those with mental health conditions and substance use disorders.¹⁸
- Spearheaded a lawsuit repealing the ACA which expanded Medicaid, and would remove coverage for mental and behavioral health services for millions of low-income enrollees.¹⁹
- Refused to provide consistent messaging or put forth a national plan to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, which has impacted the mental health and well-being of people everywhere. 47 percent of people report that the pandemic has negatively impacted their mental health.²⁰

At minimum, this list is a clear indication that you are not upholding your oath of office to protect our fellow American citizens. Not only have you attacked those in need and those with mental and behavioral health conditions, but you and your Administration continue to lie about what you are doing.²¹ Your fundamental goal seems to be to harm those in need and distract while you are doing so. I urge you to discontinue the harm you are inflicting and fully invest in improving the lives of those living with mental and behavioral health conditions.

Sincerely,



Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress



Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

¹⁵ <https://khn.org/news/trump-administration-plan-to-add-medicaid-work-requirement-stirs-fears/>

¹⁶ <https://khn.org/news/trump-administration-loosens-restrictions-on-short-term-health-plans/>

¹⁷ <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/09/10/cms-chief-seema-verma-spent-millions-in-taxpayer-funds-to-boost-personal-brand-democrats-say.html>

¹⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/10/us/repeal-affordable-care-act-donald-trump.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2019-07-08/trump-backed-lawsuit-to-invalidate-obamacare-back-in-court>

²⁰ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

²¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/02/06/seema-verma-trump-administration-not-cutting-medicaid/>;
<https://www.vox.com/2020/2/10/21131316/trump-2021-budget-entitlement-cuts>